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NICK CARTER



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A CLEVER CRIMINAL:

Or, NICK CARTER'S FORTUNATE CLEW.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER."



THE DETECTIVES SAW HER MOVE ANOTHER STEP NEARER TO THAT FATAL SPOT. THEN SHE PAUSED, AND STARTED BACK, HER EYES DILATED WITH HORROR.

A Clever Criminal;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S FORTUNATE CLEW.

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CHAPTER I.

THROUGH A LIGHTED WINDOW.

A wild storm was raging.

The air was laden with sleet that cut like a knife, and the cold was intense, for the atmosphere had reached that point when it thaws and freezes at the same time.

Two men were hurrying along with all speed through the storm. Their heads were bowed against the blast, their hats were pulled down over their eyes, and their coat-collars were turned up and buttoned tightly around their throats.

"This is a wild night, Nick," said one of them, "and I don't believe that a decent, respectable burglar will venture to ply his trade in such weather."

"Bosh, Chick!"

"All right. I'm not kicking, just moralizing; see?"

They plodded on in silence for some distance, and then Chick spoke again.

"What a beastly road!" he said.

"Country roads, and particularly those on Staten Island, are apt to be beastly in such weather as this," responded the great detective.

"It's darker than the proverbial pocket of the Ethiopian," continued the young assistant, after another pause. "I hope you know where you are, Nick, for I'm blessed if I do."

"Hush, Chick. There is our destination."

"What! Where that light glimmers?"

"Yes."

"So the burglar's intended victim lives there, eh?"

"That is the house that was mentioned in the letter. It remains to be seen whether an intended victim lives there or not."

"Precisely. Queer case this; don't you think so?"

"Very."

Yet, when all is said, the case was not especially queer.

A very illiterate and anonymous note had been received at police headquarters in New York, stating that a certain house on Staten Island was to be burglarized during the night in question.

The writer claimed to be one of the burglars, who, having a grudge against his companions, had taken that course for his revenge.

The New York police at once communicated the matter to the Staten Island force, and the conclusion was finally reached that the letter was genuine, and that it referred to a gang which had been for months terrorizing the inhabitants of the island, and which had defied all attempts on the part of the police to run the members down.

Every possible effort had been made by the local police, and all had been failures.

When the letter came, apparently giving a splendid opportunity for the capture, the chief of the Staten Island force suggested that the famous Nick Carter be sent down to assist his men in the work.

The great detective, of course, consented at once, but only after making his usual condition—that he be allowed to conduct matters in his own way, and that the entire charge of the case be given to him.

The result was that the Staten Island police had nothing to do with it.

Nick believed that the theory that too many cooks spoiled a dinner applied to his own profession as well as to others, and the wariness and cunning displayed by the Staten Island gang, in the past, convinced him that they would be equally cautious on this particular occasion.

These few paragraphs explain why the two detectives were plodding along that lonely road together in the midst of the storm, and what Nick meant when he re-

marked that the light ahead was in the house which was their destination.

They approached it cautiously, although as yet the hour was much too early for them to be upon the lookout for the men they were after.

As they drew near Nick saw that the light proceeded from a window at the front of the house, which afforded a view of the general living-room, or "sitting-room."

"Shall you make your presence known here, Nick?" asked Chick, "or shall we wait outside in the—er—gloom, as it were?"

"Wait," was the laconic reply.

When his master spoke in that tone Chick knew that he was in no mood for pleasantries.

He made no further remark, and together they went up close to the window and peered through.

There was no curtain to obstruct their vision, and as both at the same instant saw all that was in the room they uttered a simultaneous exclamation of astonishment and horror.

There was a center-table in the middle of the room, and upon it a lamp was burning.

On the floor between the table and the window, where the detectives were standing, where the light of the lamp shone full upon his face, was the body of a man, cold in death.

Chick's first impulse was to leap forward, shatter the window, and enter the room.

But the firm hand of Nick Carter restrained him.

"Wait," he said, sternly.

"Why?" breathed Chick.

"Wait," said the detective again. "Let us remain where we are for a little time. There may be more to see than now appears."

"The man is dead," insisted Chick. "There is a bullet hole in his temple; we can see that from here."

"Yes."

Nick was strangely silent.

For once even his assistant could not understand him.

He neither moved nor spoke, but remained motionless where he was standing, with his eyes fixed upon the motionless form within the room.

Several moments passed, and Chick became impatient.

Presently he started forward, and was about to speak, when the iron grip of the detective fastened itself upon his arm, warning him to keep silent.

At the same moment Nick drew his assistant forcibly back, out of the rays of light which escaped from the unshaded window.

"Look!" he whispered.

A door at the opposite side of the room was opening.

A young woman entered, and the two watchers could hear as well as see that she was singing merrily.

There was a piano near the door, and so situated that the table concealed from the woman's vision the body of the man upon the floor.

The detectives saw her glance around the room in a cursory way, and they fancied that an expression of vague surprise crossed her face, as though she were astonished to find the room tenanted.

She went directly to the piano, and seated herself upon the stool.

Her fingers ran over the keys with remarkable skill, and the room was in a moment flooded with music.

A dashing waltz was followed by a grand old march, and that was succeeded by a brilliant galop. Next came strains and favorite airs from well known operas, and at last, as though she were overflowing with good spirits, she burst into song.

Ballad after ballad followed in quick succession.

Some were familiar; some were not. All were exquisitely sung in a voice that would have done honor to any drawing-room.

"By Jove, but this is horrible!" muttered Chick.

"Hush!" said Nick.

"Fancy that poor girl sitting there, singing and playing in that way, while all the time that body is lying just beyond the table, for her to discover sooner or later."

Nick nodded.

"It's enough to drive her to a mad-house," continued Chick.

"Quite so," commented the detective.

"She was looking for him when she entered the room, too, eh, Nick?"

Nick nodded again.

"One could see that in her face," continued Chick.

"She thinks her singing will bring him."

"Perhaps."

"What is she to him anyhow? Wife, daughter, sister—"

"Widow, I should say."

"Nick, I don't want to see her when she finds that body."

"Why?"

"It will be awful."

"True."

"Let me go around to the front door, ring the bell, and maybe we can break the thing a little more gently."

"No; wait."

"But, Nick—"

"Wait, I say!"

Presently, as though tired of music, the woman left the piano stool and turned toward the table.

But she paused ere she had taken two steps, and seemed to be thinking deeply.

The light shone full upon her face, and both detectives had an opportunity to study it carefully.

It was a beautiful face—one which would attract admiration anywhere.

It was fresh and piquant; with her large, innocent blue eyes shaded by long lashes much darker than her hair, which was almost golden, she looked to be twenty years of age, and might have been thirty.

It was her figure which added the extra ten years to her possible age, for it was full, rounded, and more mature in every way than would be probable in a young lady of twenty.

Suddenly she turned and went hastily to the door by which she had entered.

She opened it, but did not pass out, and the detectives could plainly hear her calling:

"Henry! Henry!"

"You'll never get an answer again, poor girl," muttered Chick, whose heart was full of sympathy.

Presently she closed the door, and turned again toward the table.

This time she went quite to it, and for a moment paused and idly turned over several periodicals and papers that were lying there, humming an air from an opera as she did so.

Then she moved again, taking another step nearer to that fatal spot.

Another and another, while the detectives without almost ceased to breathe in the excitement of the moment.

Still another step, and then—

She paused, started back, her eyes dilated with horror, her lips parted, and then, with one wild scream, she threw herself forward full upon the horror before her.

CHAPTER II.

SEARCHING FOR CLEWS.

It was time to make a move.

The two detectives had remained standing in the driving storm nearly thirty minutes, watching the strange scene already described.

When the young woman discovered that she had been playing and singing to a lifeless body, and fell prostrate upon it, Nick Carter bounded forward, and seized the window sash.

He gave one violent jerk, and the lower half of the window shot upward with a force that shattered several panes of glass into fragments.

Even in the haste of the moment the detective found time to make a mental note of the fact that the window was unfastened.

He had applied sufficient force to it to break the fastenings had they been in place, and hence the result.

The window being opened, they bounded through, and in another instant were bending over the two bodies stretched upon the floor.

The girl was not unconscious, although she was breath-

ing heavily, as though stupefied, without being rendered senseless by the horror that she had discovered.

Nick raised her from the floor, and bore her to the other side of the room, where there was a large easy-chair.

With a quick command he ordered Chick not to touch the body of the dead man, and then he gave his entire attention to the woman.

Her eyes were wild and staring, and she presented every symptom of being on the verge of hysteria, but the detective's strong will and ready resource quickly brought her to her senses.

"Is he dead?" she gasped.

"Let us hope not," replied Nick.

He was about to say more when she leaped suddenly to her feet with a wild cry.

"You! Who are you?" she demanded. "Did you kill Henry? Why are you here? Who are you? How came you at that window at this time?"

She trembled with intense excitement, but Nick answered her with great calmness.

"I and my friend are officers," he said. "How we came here does not matter now. Are there servants in the house, or is there some one here who will assist you if I ring?"

"Yes—yes!" she gasped.

Then the horror of it all seemed to return to her with redoubled force, and she burst into a wild spasm of sobbing.

Chick heard the question and answer, and he pulled the bell-cord.

A few moments later there was a tap upon the door, and opening it the young assistant admitted a servant.

She was evidently about the same age as her mistress, and her eyes dilated with wonder when she saw two strangers there in charge of her mistress, who was weeping violently.

Her first impulse was to escape, but Chick stopped her. "Conduct your mistress to her room," he said. "This gentleman and I are officers. There has been an accident, and—"

"Oh, those dreadful burglars!" cried the girl.

"Yes," returned Chick.

With some difficulty the stricken woman was conducted from the room, and a few moments later the two detectives were alone with the murdered man.

"Now, lad," said the detective, "we have got our hands full."

"I should say so. What about the burglars?"

"We will leave the burglars out of the question for the present," said Nick. "I think there is much more in this case than now appears."

"Evidently."

They stood together beside the body of the murdered man, the assistant patiently waiting for his master to take the initiative.

Henry Danton was a man of middle age, who looked young for his years. That is, he was upward of fifty years old, but would have passed for ten years younger easily.

There was scarcely a gray hair in his head, and his mustache was still as black as coal.

That he had died instantly was at once apparent.

With the exception of the bullet hole in his temple and the unsightly marks which accompanied it, his face was as placid and unmoved as it doubtless had been the instant before the shot was fired.

"Now, Chick," said the detective, presently, "stand back and pay attention to all I say. If you observe anything which escapes my notice make a note of it, and refer to it when I am through."

"Correct!"

"Unless I greatly err this case is not one of ordinary murder. There is a deeper motive at work than mere revenge or robbery."

"Eh? Why?"

"Look there!"

Nick pointed at the murdered man's shirt bosom as he spoke.

"He was in the habit of wearing a stud," continued the detective, "and doubtless it was a valuable one, since it is missing."

"Yes, I noticed that, and—"

"And therefore thought of robbery. Look at his right hand now."

Chick did so.

The hand was partly concealed beneath the skirt of his coat, but yet the young assistant could see that a valuable diamond gleamed upon the little finger.

"Why did the murderer neglect that if booty was what he wanted?" asked Nick.

"Humph!" muttered Chick.

"Lad, there has been a clever criminal at work here, mark my word. Look behind that screen."

Chick did so.

The screen referred to partly concealed a small iron safe that stood in one corner of the room.

The key was in the lock, with a bunch of other keys hanging from it.

The safe door was open, and several bundles of letters and papers were strewn upon the floor before it.

"Another evidence of robbery," continued Nick. "Those keys were doubtless taken from the pocket of this man after he was shot down."

"Sure!"

"Now let us search his pockets. Stand back; I will do it."

He did it, removing every article that he found, examining it separately, and then returning it as before.

In the breast-pocket of the coat was a large pocket-book. Nick opened it, and found that it was filled with bills and contained nearly two hundred dollars in money.

With a significant glance at his assistant he returned the wallet to its place, and proceeded to an examination of the other pockets.

In one he found a mass of letters which he carefully looked over.

But there was nothing among them to afford him any clew, and he returned them.

Next came a card case, which proved uninteresting, except for the fact that it contained a small photograph of the woman who had played and sang in the parlor while the body was stretched upon the floor, concealed by the table.

Presently a small chamois bag was found, and upon being opened the contents proved to be a half dozen unset diamonds; true, they were not of great value, still they were diamonds.

They were replaced, as the other things had been, and the examination went on.

Nothing further was found, however, that told the detectives anything, and the trousers pocket on the right side was empty.

"There is where he carried his keys," said Nick, "and whoever shot this man knew that fact."

"Then something that was in the safe was the motive for the crime," said Chick. "Is that what you mean?"

"It would appear so now."

"Well, what next?"

"Have you studied the room at all, Chick?"

"Yes; certainly."

"What do you make of it?"

"Mighty little."

"That chair was where Henry Danton was sitting when he was shot down."

"Doubtless."

"He must have been sitting with his left side to the table, with the chair in that position."

"Sure."

"The bullet entered his right temple, and produced instant death."

"Yes."

"Now, where was the assassin?"

"Somewhere near the window, I should say."

"Just outside the window."

"Eh?"

"You heard me."

"Yes, but the window was closed. There was no bullet hole in any of the panes. If there had been we should have noticed it."

"True."

"Then—"

"Chick, the bullet was fired from outside the house."

"Humph!"

"Either the window was partly raised, or else—"

"What?"

"It had been fixed so that it could be raised noiselessly."

"Perhaps so—in decent weather. But at a time like this the best made window in the world would swell."

"True again. Did you notice that the window was unfasted?"

"Yes."

"Go now and try the window. See if you can raise and lower it noiselessly."

Chick turned to the window.

He crossed the room rapidly, and was about to do as he had been directed, when he uttered a sharp exclamation of astonishment, and bounding forward threw it violently upward.

"Nick!" he exclaimed. The next instant he had leaped through it into the darkness.

Astonished, Nick followed, but he only reached the case-ment when Chick reappeared.

"That gets me!" he muttered.

"What is the matter?"

"Nick," said Chick, "when I approached that window to raise it, as you said, I saw a face outside."

"Ah!"

"It disappeared almost as soon as I discovered it; but not too soon for me to recognize it."

"You recognized it?"

"It was the face of the woman whom we saw in this room; who played on the piano and sang. It—"

But Nick did not wait to hear more.

"Remain here!" he exclaimed.

Then, with a bound, he crossed the room, went out into the hall, and ran up the stairs with all speed.

CHAPTER III.

THE SERGEANT'S THEORY.

Nick Carter was scarcely a moment in reaching the room to which the woman had been conducted after her frightful experiences in the parlor.

By good fortune the maid who attended her was near at hand, and, as Nick rapped imperiously upon the panel, she hastened forward and placed one restraining hand upon his arm.

"Madam must not be disturbed," she said. "Such were her orders."

"I must see her at once," replied Nick, in that quick way of his which left no room for argument.

"But, sir—"

Nick interrupted her by turning the knob in an effort to enter the room.

But the door was locked.

"Have you a key to this door?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Then open it, or I will break it down. Your mistress is in danger."

The last few words seemed to act like an electric shock upon the woman.

That her mistress might be in danger seemed very likely to her, after what had already taken place.

In an instant she drew the key from her pocket, and inserted it in the lock.

The next moment the door swung open before them.

"Go in," said Nick, quickly. "See that things are all right. I must enter at once."

The maid passed through, and the detective, placing his foot in such a position that the door could not be again closed without his permission, entered.

Only a moment passed, and then—

"Well?" demanded the detective, impatiently.

"You may enter, sir," the maid replied.

Nick pushed the door ajar, and went into the room.

The maid was standing in the middle of the floor, and in front of her, half buried in a large easy-chair and clothed in a loose house-wrapper, was the mistress of the house.

Her eyes were red with weeping, but there was an expression of indignant surprise upon her face when she beheld Nick.

"Madam, you must pardon my abruptness," he said; "but necessity knows no law."

"I know that I am indebted to you, sir," she replied, quite calmly; "but why you should force yourself into my presence in this manner——"

"Pardon me again," interrupted Nick. "I must ask you a few questions."

"First, sir, tell me who you are, and why you are here."

"I am Nick Carter, and I am here because I was sent here," he replied, quickly.

Then he turned abruptly to the maid.

"Did you do as I directed?" he asked. "Has a doctor been summoned?"

"I have just sent the message, sir," she replied; and added: "I have also sent for the police."

"Good! Now, madam," returning to the mistress of the house, "will you take into consideration the fact that I am an officer and that my only desire is to aid you and to unravel this mystery?"

"I will try to do so."

"You may have heard of me, and if so——"

"I have heard of you, sir."

"Very good. Do you feel strong enough to reply to some questions?"

"Yes; I will try."

"Have you been out of this room since the maid and I conducted you here?"

"No. Certainly not."

"Have you a relative residing with you? One of your own sex?"

"I haven't a relative in the world, sir, that I am aware of."

"Indeed! Did you ever meet or hear of anybody who resembled you?"

"Never."

"Pardon me, but you are Mrs. Danton, I believe."

"Yes."

"And your first name is——"

"Sara."

She leaned back still farther in her chair, and her face suddenly assumed the hue of chalk.

Nick, perceiving it, saw that her strength was not then equal to the tax of replying to a host of questions.

"I will not trouble you more at present," he said, kindly.

"Thank you, sir."

"As soon as you feel strong enough to talk with me, there are many questions which I would like to ask. With your permission, I will remain in the house until you are equal to the task."

"In the morning, Mr. Carter. Just now I am stunned. I——"

She burst out sobbing again, and Nick, with a bow, withdrew.

There was a deep wrinkle on his brow when he again entered the parlor.

"Chick," he said, "we will soon have a lot of cops here, as well as an officious doctor or two."

"Humph?"

"Let us get through with what we want to do here before they come."

"Right."

"Take your pocket-lamp, get out of the window, and see if the ground will tell you anything."

"Very good."

"I will pursue my studies here. Work like a beaver now, for I want to be through when the doctor and the police arrive."

Chick hastened to obey, and the two detectives were soon employed in different fields although working together.

At the end of half an hour, Chick stuck his head in at the window, and discovered Nick seated in the very chair in which the murdered man had doubtless been sitting when the fatal shot was fired.

The paper which Danton had probably been engaged in reading was in his hands, but it could plainly be seen that the detective was not reading.

At that instant the rattle of wheels was heard on the graveled roadway, and, with a bound, Chick leaped into the room.

"The doctor," he said.

"Yes," returned Nick, placing the paper carefully upon

the floor where he had found it, and rising. "Have you finished?"

"Yes."

"So have I."

"What next, then?"

"Simply to wait for the doctor."

"Ah!"

"You need not tell me anything yet. I will ask when I want to know."

"All right."

The doctor presently entered the room.

He was all bustle and activity. He was a man of middle age, with a shrewd but kindly face which inspired confidence at once.

He glanced sharply at Nick and then at Chick.

"You are officers, I suppose," he said.

Nick nodded, and the physician hastened to the side of the murdered man.

One glance sufficed him.

"Dead!" he said, quickly. "My services are more needed up stairs, than here, I imagine."

"Precisely so," replied Nick.

"Has this body been moved?" continued the doctor, sharply.

"No."

"Good!"

"Nothing has been molested."

"Good again. May I inquire who you are, sir?"

Nick handed him a card bearing his own name.

"Eh?" exclaimed the doctor. "Is it possible? Good! I am glad to meet you, Mr. Carter. How does Sara——Mrs. Danton hear this?"

"Wonderfully, so far."

"Ah!"

"I fear a reaction, however. She bears up too well."

"She is a wonderful woman, Carter; I have known her since childhood. Yes, a wonderful woman; the daughter of—— Hem, h'm!"

"Indeed!" said Nick, dryly.

"I will go to her at once," continued the physician.

He turned at once and abruptly left the room.

"Nick," said Chick, when they were alone, "did you ever hear of that fellow?"

"Who?"

"Hem?"

"Often, lad; he is the individual who always steps in between you and something you were about to hear, but don't."

"Here come the policemen," said Chick.

In another moment they entered the room, five of them. Nick, having with him the authority of the chief of the Staten Island force, was at once virtually placed in charge of matters, although he assured the sergeant that he had already concluded his investigations.

"Have you found anything?" asked the sergeant.

"Nothing tangible."

"Nothing to afford a clew, eh?"

"Nothing that could be called one, certainly."

"The thing is plain to me, Mr. Carter."

"Indeed?"

"Yes."

"Then your penetration goes farther than mine, for I confess that I am puzzled."

"Have you noticed the safe?"

"Yes."

"And the fact that a large diamond is missing from Danton's shirt-bosom?"

"Was it a large diamond?"

"Oh, yes! I have seen it often."

"Indeed!"

"It was very large, very brilliant and exceedingly valuable."

"Ah!"

"He always wore it."

"A foolish thing to do."

"That's so. But its disappearance makes our work plain."

"How so?"

"Why, this confounded gang of burglars which has infested the island for months, has been here."

"Ah!"

"It's as plain as the nose on your face."
 "I'm!"
 "You see, Mr. Danton was slightly deaf, and——"
 "Is that so?"
 "Yes. It was hardly noticeable, and yet he was deaf enough so that he did not hear slight noises that would attract your attention and mine."
 "I see."
 "A man could approach him from behind without being heard."
 "That's a good point, sergeant."
 "Yes; it gives us a theory."
 "You should be a detective, instead of on the regular force. Let me hear your theory."
 "Why, we already know that burglars had their eyes on this place to-night."
 "True."
 "Let us say that one of them came a little earlier to reconnoiter. He looked in at the window; he saw Danton here; he saw the gleam of the diamond in his shirt-front; it was too much for him."
 "Humph! Well?"

CHAPTER IV.

WHO HEARD THE SHOT?

"Why, the whole thing seems very plain to me."
 "Explain; you interest me."
 "We will say that this burglar knew that Mr. Danton did not hear well."
 "Yes."
 "He saw him in that chair. The night was dark and stormy, and although it was scarcely seven o'clock in the evening——"
 "Why do you fix that hour? It is now ten."
 "True; but the thing must have happened at least three hours ago; don't you think so?"
 "Yes."
 "Well, the fellow reasoned that nobody would be near on account of the storm, that the servants were in a distant part of the house at work, dinner being just over."
 "Good; go on."
 "He wanted that diamond, and he took chances. He tried the window, and—I say, if you found that window fastened, it spoils my theory."
 "It was not."
 "Good! He raised the window, and entered the room. We will say his intention was to choke Mr. Danton, but that for some reason he had to shoot."
 "Yes; well?"
 "That frightened him. He grabbed the diamond and sloped; see?"
 "Yes. But what about the safe?"
 "Bless you! That must have been left open by the owner. The burglar never went near it. He would not dare spend the time after shooting his pistol. Somebody might have heard it, you know."
 "Naturally."
 "He did not count upon the necessity of using his gun when he first thought of committing the robbery."
 "Probably not."
 "Having committed the deed and run away, he will doubtless warn his associates and we will have no occasion to look for them here to-night."
 "I agree with you there."
 "It seems like a plausible theory; don't you think so?"
 "Very."
 "Then we have only to run down that gang of burglars to get our man. The others will not stand up for him in a matter of this kind, and the work seems easy."
 "Nick made no reply, and the sergeant, after waiting for some time for an answer, turned away to give some instructions to his men.
 A few moments later the doctor came down from his attendance upon Mrs. Danton, and Nick at once approached him.
 "Well, doctor?" he said.
 "Well?" replied the physician.
 "How do you find your patient?"
 "Very much overcome, but bearing up wonderfully well under the circumstances."

"Good!"
 "She seems unusually alert, and insists upon seeing you at once."
 "Upon seeing me?"
 "Yes."
 "Is she strong enough?"
 "I think so. Just at present the full force of the awful scene is not fully realized by her. I really think she can talk better with you now than twenty-four hours later."
 "Then I will go to her at once."
 "I think it a good plan."
 "First, I would like to ask you a few questions."
 "Ah?"
 "Mr. Danton was much older than his wife, was he not?"
 "Yes."
 "Is she his first wife?"
 "No; his second."
 "How long have they been married?"
 "About two years."
 "Lived happily, did they?"
 "Very! I never saw stronger evidence of love and confidence between husband and wife than they presented."
 "Good! When we were talking together a few moments ago, you made the remark that you had known her since childhood."
 "Yes."
 "And you started to tell me who her father was."
 "True."
 "Something interrupted you; I don't remember what. Will you finish that sentence now? Who was her father?"
 "What possible bearing can that have upon the case?"
 "Perhaps none at all. As a detective, I am curious on many seemingly unimportant points."
 "Naturally."
 "Who was Mrs. Danton's father?"
 "I would rather not tell."
 "Indeed! Why?"
 "I will be frank with you, Mr. Carter."
 "Thanks."
 "Her father was a very bad man."
 "Ah! A criminal?"
 "A very clever criminal, indeed."
 "H'm! Who was he?"
 "For Mrs. Danton's sake I will not answer that."
 "What you tell me would be in confidence."
 "I know that. Still, I do not feel justified in replying."
 "Could the answer prejudice one against Mrs. Danton?"
 "It might—you, particularly."
 "I?"
 "Yes."
 "Doctor, you puzzle me."
 "I regret that I am obliged to do so, sir. I have known Mrs. Danton a good many years, and she has always been above reproach in every way. Her father was the greatest scoundrel of his time, and you are the man who brought his career to a close."
 "I?"
 "Yes."
 "Humph! Is she aware of that fact?"
 "Perfectly."
 "Ah! And consequently hates me; eh?"
 "I do not think so."
 "It would be but natural."
 "Not in this case. She feared and detested her father. She knew him for what he was, and I think she was glad when his career was ended."
 "Indeed! You will not tell me who he was?"
 "No."
 "You were the family physician here, I believe."
 "Yes."
 "Have you been so long?"
 "Yes; a good many years."
 "Do you think this crime can be traced to anything like revenge?"
 "I do not."
 "What became of the first wife?"
 "She died."
 "Here? In this house?"
 "No; abroad."
 "Do you know that she did die?"

"Certainly."
 "Was the life they lived together a happy one?"
 "Decidedly so."
 "There was no skeleton in the closet which might have taken shape at this late day, and begotten the crime, you think?"
 "I am sure of it."
 "Danton was a rich man?"
 "Yes; though a plain one."
 "Retired from business?"
 "Yes; for several years. He was a banker, I think."
 "Where did he meet his second wife?"
 "At my house."
 "Ah! You were her guardian?"
 "Yes."
 "And approved of the marriage?"
 "Decidedly."
 "Can you give me any idea to work upon in fathoming the mystery of this case?"
 "None whatever, unless——"
 "Unless what?"
 "Unless the gang of thieves and burglars which has for a long time infested the island is accountable."
 "Humph!"
 "Don't you think that may be the solution, Mr. Carter?"
 "No."
 "Eh? What, then?"
 "I don't know."
 "Ah!"
 "Doctor, did you ever happen to know of a person who very strongly resembles your ward?"
 "Do you mean Mrs. Danton?"
 "Yes."
 "I never did."
 Nick was silent.
 "Why do you ask?" said the doctor, presently.
 "For reasons of my own which, for the present, I must keep to myself."
 "Very good. I will make my answer even more emphatic."
 "Well?"
 "Mrs. Danton is too beautiful to have a counterpart."
 Nick made no reply, and presently the doctor added:
 "She is waiting for you."
 "True. I will go to her now; but I would like to talk with you again, doctor."
 "I am always at your service, sir."
 "Thanks. You will, I hope, remain until the coroner arrives?"
 "Certainly."
 "By the way, did not Mr. Danton wear a large diamond in his shirt-bosom?"
 "Always."
 "Have you noticed that it is missing?"
 "Yes."
 "And hence your theory of burglars, eh?"
 "Partially."
 "The safe is open, and there are papers upon the floor. Did you notice that also?"
 "Yes."
 "Was it Mr. Danton's habit to leave his safe open after making use of the contents?"
 "I never knew him to do so."
 "It would seem, then, that the keys were taken from his pocket and the safe opened after the crime was committed, would it not?"
 "That would be my opinion."
 "Just two or three questions more and then I will go to Mrs. Danton."
 "Well?"
 "Aside from your professional duties, were you a frequent visitor here?"
 "Yes."
 "And were familiar with the habits of the household?"
 "Perfectly."
 "At what time did Mr. Danton dine?"
 "At six; and he was always punctual."
 "He was not a smoker, I believe?"
 "Oh, yes, an inveterate one!"
 "Had you seen him lately?"
 "This morning."

"He was well?"
 "Perfectly."
 "Then how do you account for the fact that having just dined he was not engaged in smoking at the moment of the murder?"
 "Was he not?"
 "There are no evidences of it."
 "Humph!"
 "We will leave that question for another."
 "Well?"
 "Dinner being just over—that is, supposing the crime to have been committed at or near seven o'clock, who in the house would have been most likely to have heard the report of the pistol?"
 "Mrs. Danton."
 "Why?"
 "Because her room is directly over this one. She should have heard it if she was in her room at the time."

CHAPTER V.

MRS. DANTON'S TESTIMONY.

Nick turned away, and went at once to Mrs. Danton's room.

He was strangely puzzled by the circumstances of the case in which he had become involved, for his intuitive sense assured him that there was more motive behind the strange murder than had thus far appeared.

He found the mistress of the house expecting him. Her face was flushed with momentary excitement, and at first glance it seemed as though she were eager for the interview.

"The doctor advised me to talk with you at once," said Nick, as he entered.

"Yes; it is my wish."

"I may ask questions which will seem offensive, madam, but I beg you to understand that I have no such intention," he continued.

"I understand perfectly."

"Very good. There may be other questions which will seem to you to have no bearing upon the case, yet the answers may be important."

"I will answer if I can."

"Then I will proceed. You and your husband always lived happily together, I have been told."

"Entirely so."

"Had he an enemy of whose existence you are aware?"

"Not one."

"When did you last see him alive?"

"At dinner this evening."

"What time was that?"

"At six."

"Did you leave the table at the same time?"

"Yes. We walked through the hall together."

"Do you know the time?"

"I know it exactly."

"Ah!"

"We parted at the door which opens into the parlor. I to come to my room here; he to go to his death."

Nick was silent, and she continued:

"My watch has been out of order for some time; it has been losing. As we parted I asked him for the time, and compared mine with his."

"And the result?"

"He told me that it was just six forty-two."

"Ah! and then——"

"I came to my room."

"To this room?"

"Yes."

"When did you leave it again?"

"A few moments later I remembered that I had left in the dining-room a paper that I wanted."

"And you went for it?"

"Yes."

"Then you again passed the parlor door."

"No."

"How was that?"

"I went down by the back stairs."

"Why?"

"For no reason. I simply went from my room, and instead of descending the front stairs, near my door, I went long the hall and down by the back stair-way."

"Did you meet or see any of the servants?"
 "No."
 "You got the paper?"
 "Yes."
 "What was it?"
 "The *Commercial Advertiser*."
 "Was there something in the paper that you particularly wished to read?"
 "No; the general news."
 "You returned here at once?"
 "Yes; or nearly so."
 "How long were you absent from this room?"
 "Not more than ten minutes."
 "You are positive of that?"
 "Yes."
 "Then what did you do?"
 "I read the paper."
 "In this room?"
 "Yes."
 "When did you go out again?"
 "Not until I went to the parlor, when I played upon the piano, when I——"
 "Yes; I know. During the intervening time you sat here reading?"
 "Yes."
 "Did you drop asleep?"
 "No."
 "You are positive of that?"
 "Perfectly."
 "Did you hear the report of a pistol or anything which suggested such a sound?"
 "No."
 "Try to remember."
 "I did not hear a sound that I remember."
 "Where is the dining-room situated?"
 "On the other side of the house and three rooms back. This is a large house."
 "Yes. In your opinion could you have heard the report of a pistol fired at the parlor window if you were in the dining-room?"
 "I don't know."
 "True. I will test that point."
 "I am positive of one thing."
 "What is that?"
 "Had I been in this room when the pistol was fired I would have heard it."
 "Yes; I think so, too."
 "Then, sir——"
 "Well?"
 "It must have happened while I was in the dining-room."
 "Probably. After returning here from dinner how long did you remain before you went for the paper?"
 "Not over five minutes."
 "We will say that from the time when you parted with your husband at the parlor door until you were back again in the dining-room ten minutes elapsed."
 "Yes."
 "Then to carry out the theory suggested by your words the pistol-shot must have been fired about eight minutes before seven."
 "Yes."
 "Your husband smoked?"
 "Yes, constantly."
 "Was he smoking when you left him in the hall?"
 "No. He usually lighted his cigar in the dining-room. To-night he did not do so."
 "Why?"
 "He had none in his pocket."
 "Ah!"
 "He remarked laughingly that there was a fresh box in the safe."
 "In the safe?"
 "Yes."
 "Did he keep his cigars in the safe?"
 "Yes."
 "Rather a remarkable place for them, was it not?"
 "I thought so, and often laughed at my husband for taking greater care of his cigars than of his diamonds; but he had a fancy that the cigars preserved their flavor better if kept in an iron safe."

"Ah! Were you in the parlor before dinner?"
 "Yes."
 "Was the safe open then?"
 "If it was I did not notice it."
 "Was it usually kept locked?"
 "Always."
 "And he carried the keys with him?"
 "Yes."
 "Do you know in what pocket?"
 "In the right hand trousers pocket."
 "Figuring that he went directly to the safe for his cigars upon entering the room, he might have left the safe open; don't you think so?"
 "It is possible, but not at all like him."
 "I have examined the safe, Mrs. Danton, and I found a box of cigars in it."
 "Ah!"
 "But the box had never been opened. The stamp was not broken, and therefore if he went to the safe he did not touch the cigars."
 "But that seems impossible, knowing his habits as I do."
 "It may have been his intention to take a cigar from the box; he may have proceeded as far as opening the safe, and then have changed his mind."
 "Yes; it is possible."
 "Something may have called his attention elsewhere for the moment."
 "True."
 "At all events, he had not lighted a cigar when the shot was fired, although the safe was open. Now I will touch upon another subject which may be painful to you."
 "What is it, sir?"
 "You have been married about two years, have you not?"
 "Yes."
 "Were you ever married before?"
 "No, sir."
 "Was there a suitor for your hand who was repulsed? One who was jealous? Who made threats, or who failing, to do so, was yet to be feared?"
 Her eyes gleamed strangely for one instant, and Nick continued:
 "In other words, do you know of any incident in your life or his which could explain this crime as the result of jealousy?"
 "I do not."
 "Think, madam."
 "I have thought, sir."
 "Pardon me, but I fancied that you hesitated when I began these questions, as though you did in fact recall something of the kind."
 "You were mistaken."
 "Indeed! Then why——"
 "Pardon me, sir. There can be nothing of that kind, I assure you."
 "Madam, I do not seek to incriminate anybody. Did such a circumstance exist I could trace it to the minutest detail before a shadow could fall upon the fair fame of anybody."
 "I believe you, sir."
 "And there is nothing?"
 "Nothing."
 "We will leave that point. Now, another."
 "Yes."
 "Have you ever visited your husband's safe since your marriage?"
 "Never."
 "Nor had the key in your possession?"
 "Never; but why——"
 "Pardon me; this is a line of questioning which seems to have no meaning. Have you ever been in the room when the safe was open?"
 "Possibly. I cannot say."
 "Then, to the best of your recollection, you have not?"
 "To the best of my recollection I have not."
 "Pardon me again; are you quite positive that you never took anything from the safe at your husband's request or otherwise?"
 "Sir!"
 "I mean that you might have handed him a cigar or a

paper that he wanted, and the circumstance have escaped you."

"My hand was never inside the safe, sir."

"You speak with some dignity upon this subject, madam; was there any reason why you preferred to remain aloof from the safe?"

"There was."

"Ah! Will you tell me what it was?"

"I will say this much. I often bantered him about the safe, and endeavored to have it placed in another room. It was the one thing in which he would not let me have my way, and I was foolishly sensitive about it."

"Did he keep money in the safe?"

"Very little, if any."

"Only papers, eh?"

"Deeds and mortgages; his will, I believe, and documents of a business character."

"Your husband was fond of diamonds, I believe."

"They were his hobby. He always had a number in his possession, and he was constantly buying more, but he always carried them in his pockets."

CHAPTER VI.

A FORTUNATE CLEW.

The detective was satisfied that he had learned all that Mrs. Danton could tell him, at least for the present, and as she appeared to be very much overcome by the ordeal of questioning, he took his leave, and returned to the room below where the body of the murdered man still awaited the arrival of the coroner.

Chick was there with eyes and ears on the alert, and Nick at once drew him aside.

"Now, lad," he said, "what did you find?"

"Mighty little."

"But you did find something?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"I found the prints of a woman's shoe in the soil underneath the window, where the grass does not grow."

"Ah!"

"The foot-prints were made after we entered the house, proving that I was not mistaken in the belief that I saw a face at the window."

"Good!"

"And I believe that face either belonged to the mistress of this house or to somebody as like her as two peas."

"It could not have been hers, Chick."

"Perhaps not."

"I was only a moment in reaching her room, and she was in her chair. She was dressed in a loose wrapper, and I don't believe she had moved since we first took her there."

"Who was it then?"

"You tell me."

"I can't."

"Did you get more than a glimpse of her?"

"No."

"Yet in that glance you should be able to say something more than merely that she resembled Mrs. Danton."

"What, for instance?"

"Was she bareheaded?"

"No; she wore some sort of a hood."

"Ah!"

"Such a one, I should say, as forms a part of a lady's waterproof."

"Humph! did she have on a waterproof?"

"I give it up."

"Were there traces of any other foot-prints out there?"

"Yes; our own—"

"Of course."

"And there were marks made by the same shoes as those I just described, only they were made before ours."

"Good!"

"Why?"

"Why! They prove, do they not, that the woman whose face you saw at the window had been there at least once before to-night."

"Sure."

"And that in all likelihood she either committed the crime or saw it done."

"Or at least knew who did it, eh?"

"Exactly."

"Nick, I don't believe a woman could shoot straight enough to kill that man as Danton was killed, from the window, unless—"

"Well?"

"Unless she came in at the window and got close to her victim before she fired."

"That was not done by her or by anybody, Chick."

"Why?"

"Because there would have been some evidence of the fact left upon the carpet."

"Ah!"

"There was and is not a trace there that we did not make ourselves."

"I see."

"Therefore the bullet was fired from the outside of the window."

Suddenly Chick, who had seemed to pay very little attention to the last remark, turned and seized Nick's arm.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed.

"Got what?"

"Walk over to the window with me."

"Very good."

"Have you examined it at all?"

"No. I left the window and all beyond it to you."

"Look there!" said Chick, for they had reached the window, and while the officers in the room watched them with great interest the young assistant pointed at a mark on the bottom of the casing.

What he indicated was simply a smutch of mud on the white paint. Examining it closely, traces of the palm of a person's hand could be seen, where Nature had drawn such slender and delicate lines.

Nick was instantly all attention.

"Have you touched this at all, Chick?" he asked.

"No."

"What a mercy!"

The detective got down upon his knees by the window. He drew forth his little lantern and bade Chick do the same.

Then with the slender but fierce rays of light from both lanterns thrown full upon the spot he began a minute investigation.

Presently he straightened up, and turning to Chick said:

"You remarked a moment ago that you had got it."

"Yes."

"What did you mean?"

"Simply a proof that some person did enter the room, whether traces were left upon the carpet or not."

"Chick, I have found two clues to-night. One that I will not mention yet, and this."

"You always see more than anybody else can. What is there in this?"

"First, let me ask you if you are sure this spot was not made by either of us?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"For two reasons."

"What are they?"

"For one, I don't think either of us had any mud on our hands when we reached the window to-night. We both wore gloves, and—"

"What is the other reason?"

"That stain was made by mud that came from a barn-yard."

"Good! Correct!"

"And I am mighty sure there wasn't any such stain on my hands to-night; nor do I believe there was on yours."

"Right again. Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Chick, the hand that left that stain there was much smaller than either yours or mine."

"Ah!"

"It was a woman's hand."

"How do you know that?"

"By the lines. They are very delicate, very finely drawn. One can scarcely see them."

"True."

"If you will go out of the window again and search the

ground once more you will find a spot where a pair of shoes were dropped to the ground from the window, that is if they struck where they could leave a mark."

"I'll go and see."

"No; never mind; I believe I am correct."

"The shot was fired from the outside of the window; after it was fired and had taken effect the assassin climbed upon the window-sill. Do you see?"

"Yes."

"There she—for I believe the assassin was a woman—removed her shoes and dropped them outside."

"Well?"

"The right one did not come off easily."

"How the dev—"

"Chick, that mark was made with the left hand, which is the one that would be employed in removing the right shoe."

"Of course."

"If it came off easily the person wearing it would not have been obliged to seize the sole in removing it."

"Ah!"

"The shoe had been worn in a barn-yard recently. Some of the soil stuck to it, just beneath the instep."

"I see."

"To-night the wet grass and the moisture of the earth softened that particle which stuck there, so that when a hand was pressed hard upon the spot it brought away the stain."

"That's plain enough."

"The shoes being removed and dropped outside, the person—bah! let us say the woman!—placed her hand upon the window-sill, in order to steady herself while she stepped into the room."

"Humph!"

"And the mark which you found was left."

"Good!"

"I want you to find a piece of thin white paper."

"Correct."

"Grease it thoroughly, and then tack it over that stain. When you have done that trace every line in that stain upon the paper with your pencil. Be very careful, Chick, and get it exactly right."

"You bet I will!"

"It is the palm of a woman's left hand. I know something about palmistry, and—"

"You don't expect to be able to read the woman's name from that, do you?"

"Hardly."

"Then what—"

"Chick, if you see a face to-day for the first time, but meet it again to-morrow, you remember it; eh?"

"Sure."

"When I have studied the drawing that you will give me I will know the hand that placed that stain there if I ever see it."

"That's what I call a fortunate clew."

"Perhaps so; let us hope so."

"I believe that it will unravel this mystery."

"Good! Now, could you trace those foot-prints outside at all?"

"No. There is only a spot there where the grass does not grow."

"And there was nothing except on that spot?"

"Nothing."

"No trace of stockinged feet?"

"I didn't find any."

"Yet the woman must have gone out the same way she came in."

"It seems so."

"I have it, Chick."

"Well, what?"

"When she went out she jumped. Either by accident or design she cleared the bare spot, and alighted upon the grass."

"That's it."

"Then she reached for her shoes, and in a moment more was gone."

"Sure."

"The assassin was a woman, but what woman? Why did she take Danton's diamond stud and leave his money and the loose gems?"

"Give it up!"

"Why did she take the trouble to open the safe and search it, and what did she find there of value to her?"

"A will, perhaps."

"It may be. There was something there that she wanted, and, lad, she wanted it badly enough to commit a murder to get it."

CHAPTER VII.

LAYING A SNARE.

Both detectives remained silent for some moments.

"Chick," said Nick, suddenly, "how's your nose?"

"Eh?" and the assistant placed one hand tenderly to his nasal organ.

"Take a walk over to that safe."

"Certainly. What for?"

"You need not touch anything; only come back and tell me what you smell."

Chick went to the safe and got upon his knees before it.

But he did not remain there a moment.

He rose immediately, and rejoined Nick, uttering, as he did so, the one word:

"Cloves!"

"Right, Chick."

"Have you searched the safe?"

"Yes; very thoroughly."

"Find any cloves?"

"No."

"Then where does the scent come from?"

"How do you expect me to reply to that now?"

"Ah! The other clew, eh?"

"Yes."

"Isn't it rather strange that there should be such a scent of cloves in that safe if there are no cloves there, but, on the contrary, tobacco, which should overcome it?"

"Very."

"Tobacco makes a very strong scent. One can plainly smell the cigars in that box, and yet above it all is the scent of cloves."

"Precisely."

"Nick, do you know what causes it?"

"I suspect, but I don't know."

"Ah!"

"We have got two very small clews to work upon, lad; clews which few would entertain at all, but I think they will lead us to the person who fired that fatal shot."

"I hope so."

"Make your drawing now, lad. The coroner will be here presently, and he will run things when he does come, you may be sure."

The drawing was made and safely tucked away in the detective's pocket-book before that august individual arrived, however.

Then the coroner came.

The usual examination was made of the scene surrounding the crime, and the body of the victim, and then permission was given to remove to another room all that remained of Henry Danton.

Nick did not get another chance to talk with the doctor. To the detective it seemed as though he purposely held aloof from him—as though he tried to avoid a conversation.

The night wore away and daylight came.

With it the storm ceased, and the sun came out bright and glorious.

"Now, Chick," said the detective, "I want you to do some outside work."

"I'm ready."

"First, go to the Staten Island chief and get the letter that he received which brought us here."

"Correct."

"Tell him that we have hit upon some clews, but don't tell him what they are yet."

"Right."

"Bring that letter to me."

"Yes."

"We may find another clew in that."

"Why do you think that burglars—"

"I think burglars had nothing to do with it."

"Then—"

"I think the letter was a decoy."

"Ah!"
 "It was written by somebody who had a deep purpose in view."
 "Doubtless."
 "And that purpose was to bring somebody here either in time to witness the murder or in time to discover what we found."
 "By Jove!"
 "Either the person who fired that shot sent the letter or it was written by somebody who knew that the crime was meditated."
 "I see."

"Believe me, Chick, there was no burglary intended here last night, or if there was the writer of that letter did not know it."

"Humph!"
 "Take a good sniff of that letter when you get hold of it."

"For cloves?"
 "Yes."
 "Would the scent of the roses hang round it still?"
 "Perhaps. Ask the chief if he smelled cloves when he received the letter."

"I will."
 "When you get through come back here."
 Chick departed.

A half-hour later Nick was at the stables, talking with the hostler and admiring the animals.

"Mr. Danton was very fond of horses, wasn't he, Michael?"

"Yis, sor; he loved 'em."
 "Quite right. And Mrs. Danton; is she fond of them also?"

"She dotes on 'em, sor."
 "Who loved the horses best in all the house, Michael? I love horses myself, and a person who is fond of them goes up several points in my regard."

"Well, sor, I think the missus loves 'em best, but for a woman who knows a horse from frog to tooth give me Jane."

"Jane! Who is Jane?"
 "The missus' maid, sor."

"Oh! Does she come to the stable often, Michael?"
 "As often as she can, sor, an' many's the pint about hosses that she's guv me, sor, too."

"Indeed! Where did she acquire so much knowledge?"
 "From her fayerther, sor."

"Ah!"
 "He was a jockey in his young days, I've heard her say."

"Ah! That accounts for it of course."

"Yis, sor."
 "Jane is a very pretty girl, Michael."

"Yis, sor."
 "Are you sure she comes to see the horses?"

"Eh!"
 "Doesn't she like to talk to the hostler as well?"

"What! an ould man loike me, sor?"
 "Yes."

"Divil a bit. It's the hosses sure."
 "Do you like Jane, Michael?"

"Not over much, sor; still small right have I to say aught agin a woman, sor."

"Right. Michael, do you see this?"
 Michael's eyes opened wide.

"Faith, I do, sor," he said. "It's a bill."

"Yes, a twenty-dollar bill."

"That same, sir."

"Look at it closely, and while you look at it answer a few questions."

"Faith, I will."

"You have a brother—"

"Divil a brother, sor."

"Tut, tut! You have a brother whose name is Patrick. Have you forgotten him?"

"Be gob, I have, sor; divil a recollection have I of that same."

"Tut, tut! Look more closely at the bill."

"I am, sor."

"Now try to remember your brother Pat, who has been coming to see you for a long time."

"It begins to dawn on me, sor."
 "I'll describe him for you."
 "That will be a great kindness, sor. Faith, I wouldn't know him otherwise, the spalpeen!"

"Yet he has not changed."

"Of course not."

"He has red hair."

"Sure! That's the Irish blood."

"And he is freckled."

"So he is. Faith I had forgot that same."

"He limps a little also."

"True for you. Be gob, that's where the priest gave him a drubbing wanst in the ould country."

"Quite right, Michael. Your memory is improving."

"Bedad! That's a great memory I have, sure."

"You have been expecting Pat for a long time."

"Wakes an' wakes."

"He'll arrive to-day."

"Bless the b'y. Sure his ould mither tould me to watch over him, but what wid the hosses an'—"

"And Jane."

"That same—divil a bit av watchin' have I done."

"He calls you Mickey for short."

"Ah, sor, he has a lovin' heart, has Pat."

"How old are you, Michael?"

"Forty-four, sor."

"How old is Patrick?"

"Sure, he must be thirty by this time. A foine sprig of a b'y he was, too."

"Michael, you're a jewel."

"So is Pat, sor."

Nick laughed.

"You'll find a place for Patrick to sleep and something for him to eat when he comes."

"Faith I will, sor."

"Now can you find a place to put this bill?"

"I can, sor."

"Patrick sent you a message."

"The divil he did."

"Yes. He won't stay very long. When he goes away he'll leave another bill just like this with you."

"He's a jewel of a b'y, sor."

"He ought to reach here by noon, Michael."

"Sure he ought."

"You will be looking for him?"

"Won't I! Faith it's two years—no, three—since I saw the darlint."

"Good-by, Michael."

"Good-by, sor."

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK'S CLEVER STRATEGY.

It was shortly after noon that same day that an Irishman, about thirty years old, with a stick and a bundle over his shoulder, came in at the front gate and asked the gardener for Michael Donohoe.

He was directed to the stable, and he limped his way along in that direction.

Michael was sitting just outside the door when the lame fellow approached.

But he leaped to his feet, threw down his pipe, and started like one who had seen a ghost.

"Be gob, it's Pat!" he cried.

"So it is, Mickey," returned the new-comer.

The next instant they were hugging like a pair of school-girls.

There was a reason for their effusiveness, for the maid, Jane, was at that moment approaching from the house.

She looked on in surprise, and, when she came nearer, she said, sharply:

"Who is this person, Michael?"

"Bedad, he's my brother, so he is."

"I never heard that you had a brother."

"Sure, ye never heard that I had lost me big toe on the right fut, did ye, Miss Jane?"

"No."

"Well, I've had that—sure, I mane I haven't had it, longer than I've had me brother."

"Ah, well! He must not remain here now, Michael."

"Och! Sure, Miss Jane, he'll make no trouble at all, at all. He'll slape in the stable along o' me, and I'll give him to ate—"

"No; I mean that under the circumstances you must not have company," and she glanced suspiciously at the detective, for the reader knows that Patrick was Nick Carter in disguise.

"Sure!" cried Michael, indignantly. "if the master was alive, rist his soul, he'd never turn me brother out."

"Perhaps not, but—"

"An' by the same token, Miss Jane, he'll stay till them in authority says he must go."

"Oh, very well! I will speak to Mrs. Danton."

Michael tossed his head, and turned away.

Jane, having had her say, went on into the stable, and Nick, stepping quickly behind her as she walked, crossed her path within three or four feet of her.

He stopped suddenly.

"Mickey," he said, impressively, a moment later.

"Ay, Pat."

"Do you smell anything?"

"Sure, I do."

"What?"

"The hosses."

"Anything more?"

"Me pipe."

"No—no! There is something else."

"Then begob it's Miss Jane."

"It is, Mickey."

"Sure, she always smells that way, Pat. It's the cloves she ates."

"True for you, Mickey."

"I axed her wanst why she ate 'em."

"And she said—what?"

"Because she liked 'em, bedad."

"The best reason in the world, Mickey."

"Sure, that's why I smoke me pipe."

"True. Does she always eat them, Mickey?"

"She always smells of them."

"How long have you had this job, Mickey. Sure, it's a fat place."

"It is that. Three years have I been here, Pat."

"That's foine. And Miss Jane?"

"She came with the missus."

"Did she eat cloves, then?"

"Sure, she did."

"I say, Mickey."

"What?"

"What do they do wid their ould shoes here?"

"Are ye wantin' some, Pat?"

"I am."

"Faith yer feet are so big—"

"I want 'em for me wife."

"Are ye married, then?"

"I am."

"Have ye lost yer senses, Pat, since we left the ould place? But if it's shoes ye want, begob ye shall have 'em."

"Lady's shoes, Mickey."

"Sure."

At that moment Jane left the stable and returned slowly to the house, and, as she passed, Nick saw her take a small pouch from her pocket, extract a clove, and place it between her lips.

"A regular clove fiend," he mused. "Can it be that it was she who fired that shot?"

He saw that she passed over a bit of soft earth on her way back. A spot where the storm of the preceding day had softened the soil enough so that he knew the imprint of her foot would be left there.

He kept up a rattling conversation with Michael until Jane had disappeared.

Then he went hastily to the spot described, and, drawing a tape from his pocket, bent over the ground.

In a moment he returned to the stable door, and seated himself upon a chair that Michael had brought out for him.

"Michael," he said.

"What?"

"Never moind the shoes."

"Eh?"

"I don't want 'em."

"Pat, have ye lost yer wife?" asked the hostler, with great gravity.

Nick laughed.

"No," he said; "but she don't need shoes as bad as she did."

Michael looked puzzled.

"Pat," he said, presently, "what war ye doin' wid the tape?"

"Measurin'."

"Ye don't say so. Measurin' what?"

"The soil."

"Faith, how much did ye find?"

"Just enough."

"Pat, ye puzzle me. When we war boys together, an' old Father Conlin gave ye the drubbin'—"

Nick looked up quickly.

The sudden change in Michael's tone told him to be on his guard.

Jane was returning, and was already within a few feet of them.

"Michael," she said, sharply.

"At yer sarvice, Miss Jane."

"Mrs. Danton says that your brother cannot remain here now."

"Why?"

"Because I advised her to send him away."

"Why did ye do that?"

"Never mind, I did it. Give him his dinner, but let him go elsewhere after that."

"Sure, that's hard, miss."

It was Nick who spoke, and his eyes rested meekly upon the clear, strong face of the woman before him.

It was a strong face, full of character, and to a physiognomist loyal and true.

She made no answer, and Nick continued:

"Miss, I have always been a wanderer. Me brother here never sees me any more. Me fut is bad, an' I wanted to rest before I went farther."

"I am sorry for you."

"Thankee. Give me yer left hand for a minute, miss."

"My hand! For what?"

"Sure, I lived a long time wid gipseys, and they taught me many things."

"Ah!"

"I can rade fortunes loike a printed book. Sure, I'll rade yer fortune fur nothin' av ye'll let me stay till mornin'. Then I'll go on, so I will."

"Will you leave in the morning?"

"Afore yer up, miss."

"Very well. You may remain till then."

"Now, give me yer hand while I rade yer fate."

"No; I don't care for that."

Nick saw that she was curious, however.

"It takes only wan glance, miss," he said. "Then ye can stand there as yer standin' now—The left hand, miss."

She extended it, half-reluctantly, and Nick grasped it eagerly.

At the same instant he drew the tracing that Chick had made from his pocket, and spread it open.

"What is that?" she asked.

"Me oracle."

"Ah! You have set rules to go by."

"No, miss. Wait, kape silent now, for wan minute, then I will rade yer hand."

She complied.

Nick held the paper close to her open palm, and his flashing eyes went from one to the other with lightning rapidity.

Then he released the hand, and quietly folding the paper, placed it in his pocket.

"Well?" asked Jane.

"Miss, I don't want to rade yer hand for you."

"Why not?"

"Sometimes I see things that I hope ain't so."

"But you think they are true?"

"Yes."

"Tell me what you saw."

"There are things that are better left untold, miss."

"Bah!"

"If all that I see there is true, and you knew what was to happen—no, I can't tell you the fate I see there."

Jane's face grew very pale.

She tried to smile, but the effort was a failure.

"I insist that you tell me," she said.

Nick shook his head.

"You promised," she continued.

"So I did."

"Then keep your word."

Still he seemed to hesitate, and Jane stamped her foot impatiently.

"Come," she said; "tell me what you mean, or I shall withdraw the permission for you to remain here to-night with your brother."

"Miss, don't ye see that it's a kindness I'm tryin' to do ye in not tellin' all I saw in yer hand."

"I want to hear what you have to say."

"So be it, miss. I'll tell ye what I saw in yer hand, since ye insist upon it."

CHAPTER IX.

TWO FORTUNES.

Nick still appeared very reluctant to tell what he had seen, conveying the impression that he only did it under protest, but he began, as he had said he would.

"There is a great burden on your mind, miss," he said.

She started.

"You are keeping a secret which you want nobody livin' to know."

She started even more violently.

"Whether the secret is your very own, or ye are kapin' it for somebody else, I don't know, but sure, ye have the secret."

"Nonsense!"

"I think the secret troubles you, and I know it will bring you trouble."

"Ah!"

"You ask me how I know that."

"Yes."

"I see it in your hand. Close beside the secret is great trouble, and—I can't go on, miss."

"I insist."

"I see prison bars. God grant it ain't you who goes behind 'em."

"What do you mean, you—"

"Miss, I didn't want to tell you what I saw."

"True. Go on."

"There is a death there, too."

"Great Heaven!"

"It is not your own, but it affects you."

"How does it affect me?"

"You suffer for it."

"I?"

"Yes. In your heart, I think."

"You are a strange man."

"I am, miss."

"Is there any more?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"I can give you a warning, if you will take it."

"What?"

"The trouble seems to cling to you only because of your present surroundings."

"Ah!"

"I think by going away you could avoid them."

"And your advice is for me to run away, then?"

"It is, miss."

"From what?"

"From danger."

"What kind of danger?"

"I can't tell. It may be the prison. It may be the death; it may be the secret. I can only see that it's great trouble."

Jane laughed a little, coldly.

"If fortunes were to be relied upon, I might take your advice," she said. "As it is, I will not run away; at least not yet."

"You must make your own choice, miss."

"Thank you."

"There is a man and a woman mixed up in this affair."

"Indeed! A dark man and a jealous woman, who is a fiend I suppose."

"You're making game of me now, miss."

"Bah!" she said, contemptuously.

Then, without another word, she turned and hastened toward the house.

When she was gone, Michael turned and looked curiously at his supposed brother.

"Pat," he said, "ye bate me."

"How?"

"Tellin' fortins."

"Shall I tell yours?"

"Yes, begob."

"Give me your hand."

Michael extended his brawny and horny palm, which smelled of the stable.

"That's a foine hand, Mickey," said Nick.

"Go on wid the fortin."

"I see that this hand recently grasped a twenty-dollar bill."

"Begob, what eyes ye have!"

"And it's going to get another."

"Sure, but that's pleasant."

"It may receive two more."

"Eh? How?"

"By doing just exactly as your long lost brother directs."

"What does he want?"

"He wants to enter the house to-night when all is still."

"I'll have to think about that."

"Why?"

"I ain't seen that brother in so long that he may have growed into a robber."

"No, Mickey, a robber-catcher."

"Hey?"

"A detective."

"Who is he?"

"He is known as Nick Carter, Mickey."

"Arrah, there! Ye don't mane it."

"I do."

"Then begob, Pat, it's a true fortin ye've told."

"I thought so."

"Whist, now! How'll ye get in?"

"By the door, Mike."

"Sure! But what have I to do?"

"Stay here where you are."

"That's aisy, too."

"You have only to wait and keep silent."

"Begob, I kin do that same."

"Of course."

"I say, Pat."

"What?"

"Are ye lookin' for the spalpeen as shot the master?"

"Yes."

"Do ye think Jane done that same?"

"I don't think anybody did it, Mike."

"Sure, did he fall dead just fur instance, thin?"

"No."

"What the devil do ye mane, anyhow?"

"I mean that I think I know who did it."

"Oh!"

"That's better than thinking."

"It is that. What are you going into the house for?"

"Because I want to, Mickey. Now, don't ask any more questions. Remember those two twenties, and keep your mouth shut."

"Sure!"

Just then a tramp turned in at the gate, and walked directly toward the stable.

"Blast the feller!" muttered Michael, "I'll make short work of him."

"Let him alone, Mike."

"Why?"

"I want to talk to him?"

"Is he another brother?"

"Yes, of mine."

"Then he can come."

The tramp came nearer, and, as there was nobody around except the hostler and his companion, he spoke up boldly.

"Never mind playing a part now, Chick," said Nick.

"Mike is all right."

"Good!"

"Have you been to the police?"

"Yes."

"Did you get the note?"

"Yes."

"Smell cloves?"
 "Yes."
 "Humph! The maid—oh, Michael, will you go and rub that bay horse down a little?"
 "Sure. It's meself who knows when I'm not wanted."
 "Well?" said Chick, when he had gone.
 "The maid is a clove fiend."
 "Ah!"
 "She eats them constantly, and carries a lot about with her."
 "Fine idea that."
 "Her clothing, her person, and her breath smells of them."
 "Humph!"
 "She came out to the stable a little while ago, and left her foot-print over there; see it?"
 "Yes."
 "I measured it."
 "Of course."
 "It tallies exactly."
 "Then all we've got to do is to clap the darbies on her, and take her in."
 "Not so fast, Chick."
 "Why?"
 "There's one point that does not fit."
 "What?"
 "The palm of her hand."
 "It doesn't?"
 "No."
 "Humph!"
 "Her hand is no more like the drawing you made than mine is."
 "That's odd."
 "It's puzzling."
 "I say, Nick, you searched that safe."
 "Yes."
 "What made it smell of cloves? A person couldn't scent it up by blowing breath into it, or by walking past it."
 "True."
 "Then, what did it?"
 "A paper."
 "Oh!"
 "And I found the paper."
 "Indeed! What was it?"
 "Wait. Anything which is put into a pocket were there are a lot of cloves, will become scented with them."
 "Sure."
 "A paper had been put into that safe after the murder was committed."
 "I see."
 "Before being put there, it had been carried in a pocket where there were cloves."
 "Humph!"
 "That is what retained the scent."
 "Exactly. What kind of a paper was it?"
 "A will."
 "Ah! Danton's will?"
 "Yes."
 "Then we get at the motive; eh?"
 "Perhaps. The will was easily and quickly read, and it leaves the entire property to the wife."
 "Humph! Do you think she is mixed up in this thing?"
 "Who can say?"
 "Queer case, isn't it, Nick?"
 "Very; but although it has just begun we are nearing the end. I will know who shot Henry Danton before I am twelve hours older."
 "Nick."
 "Well?"
 "It must have been his wife."
 "It may have been. Give me that note now. I have use for it."

CHAPTER X.

A STRANGE DENOUEMENT.

It was eleven o'clock that night when Nick Carter softly entered the house where so much had occurred in the last few hours.

He was still arrayed in the disguise of Michael's brother Patrick, but he had forgotten the limp and all that went with it.

During the afternoon, assisted by one of the girls in the house who was very friendly with Michael, he had succeeded in securing a specimen of Jane's handwriting.

Being an expert in matters of chirography, the detective was not long in discovering that Jane was the writer of the letter which had been sent to the chief of police of the Staten Island force.

The case, as it stood, looked decidedly as though Jane was the guilty party.

The cloves, the measurement of the shoes, the letter to the police giving an account of the expected raid by the burglars, and the woman's over evident suspicion of Michael's supposed brother, all tended that way.

Yet there was one point in which the evidence failed to connect.

That point was the impression of the palm of somebody's left hand, left upon the window-seat of the parlor.

The detective was satisfied that whoever had left that mark there was the person who had fired the fatal shot, and he was equally positive that Jane's hand had not left the impression.

Whose, then?

His mission in the house was almost solely to find the very shoes that had been worn by the guilty party, for he was thoroughly convinced that the murderer was in the house.

"Could it be the wife?" he mused, as he threaded his way cautiously toward the rooms which he wished to examine.

"Can it be possible that a woman could shoot like that?"

"Could she, having committed the deed, have returned to her rooms, have removed the evidence of her crime, and then have descended to the parlor and played upon the piano and sang, as did Mrs. Danton, knowing all the time that a corpse—the corpse of her husband, was lying stark and stiff, just beyond the table?"

It seemed incredible.

The detective made his way softly up the stairs.

He had asked questions enough, and had made sufficient investigation, so that he knew exactly the location of the maid's room.

He went at once to her door.

Bending forward, he listened cautiously for a sound from within.

None came.

Everything was as silent as the grave.

Presently he softly turned the door knob, and pressed upon it.

The door was not locked.

It opened at his touch, and he entered.

The moon shone in at the window, and by its light he could see the maid, Jane, lying upon her bed asleep.

She was fully dressed.

Above her head hung suspended a bell, and the detective at once reasoned that it communicated by a cord with her room of her mistress.

But the maid was asleep.

Tired nature had asserted itself, and she was totally oblivious to all the world.

Softly, step by step, the detective approached.

For a moment his eyes rested upon her.

Then, making no noise, he softly tiptoed to the closet and opened the door.

Upon the inside hung a shoe-bag, such as ladies use for a receptacle for their shoes and slippers.

Every pocket was full.

He began at the beginning, first pulling the door half shut and resorting to the light of his pocket lantern.

Each shoe was taken out, in turn, and examined.

It was not until he came to the last pair that his search was rewarded.

There, securely wedged beneath the instep he found the very thing for which he was searching.

A bit of soil, gathered from the stable, and still clinging upon it, a pebble or two which might have come from the bare spot beneath the parlor window.

He examined it critically.

There could be no mistake.
"Everything except that hand," he muttered. "How shall I explain that?"
Softly he stepped from the closet into the room, and closed the door behind him.

As he did so, the bell above the bed jangled sharply. He would have darted again into the closet and concealed himself had there been time.

But there was not.
With the touch of the bell, Jane leaped from the bed. The light of the moon shone full upon the detective, where it streamed in at the window.

She saw him instantly.
She did not scream, nor even cry out.
For an instant she stood still, facing him.
Then, in a voice that was perfectly calm, she spoke:
"So!" she said, "my suspicions were true."
"About me?" said Nick, as calmly.

"Yes."
"Evidently."
"Who are you?"
"I am Nick Carter."
"I thought so."
"Jane, you are my prisoner."
"Indeed!"

"Yes."
"For what?"
"For the murder of Henry Danton."
She was silent for a moment.
Then, with strange calmness, she said:
"Tell me why you think me guilty."
"There are many reasons."
"Tell them to me."
"You placed a paper in your master's safe last night."

"I did."
"Ha! You confess."
"Certainly."
"To the murder, also?"
"No."
"The paper was a will——"
"Wait. I not only placed a paper there, but I took another from the safe."

"Another will?"
"Find out. You who are so smart."
"I traced you, Jane, because the paper smelt of cloves."
"Ah!"
"You eat them constantly."
"Yes."
"You carried the will in your pocket with the cloves before you put it in the safe?"

"Yes."
"Was Henry Danton dead when you did that?"
"Yes."
"Did you shoot him?"
"I will not answer that."
"Listen, your footsteps measure the same as those found beneath the window."
"Yes."

"And here, I find the shoes, the very shoes that were worn by the murderer."

"True."
"Then you wore them?"
"I will not answer."
"I must arrest you for the murder."
"You may do your duty; but——"
"But what?"

"I pray that you will let me answer that bell first."

"Why?"
"She has called me. I must go; if I do not——"

"Well, if you do not——"
"Oh, I must go!"
"Go. I will be near at hand."
She turned without a word, and went out of the room.

A moment later she opened the door to her mistress's room, and entered.

Nick, who was close behind her, placed his foot between the door and the casing, so that Jane could not shut him out.

He became at once aware that something remarkable was taking place.

Mrs. Danton was walking up and down the room, talking in a low, concentrated tone.

Jane endeavored to hush her, but without avail.

"Jane!" she cried; "Jane!"

"Yes, madam."

"It pursues me yet, Jane."

"Nonsense. I cannot. We have buried it."

"It has risen to haunt me. Ah, that eye—that flaming eye!"

"Hush! Hush!"

"I will not hush! He wore it upon his bosom for so long. I besought him to take it away, and he only laughed."

"He did not know."

"No; he did not know. How could he? That flaming eye; that eye of a fiend, which he called a diamond."

Nick started.

Then, obeying a sudden impulse, he thrust open the door, and entered the room.

"We buried the eye, madam," he said.

"Truly?"

"Yes."

"Then all is well."

"Tell me how you conquered it?"

She laughed softly.

Then, forgetting Jane, she came and stood in front of Nick.

"Don't you know?" she asked.

"No; tell me."

"Why, the eye bothered me. It came and woke me in my sleep, and my life was made a hell by it."

"I see."

"Then, something whispered to me that I must get it, and oh, how carefully I planned it. You will not tell?"

"No."

"Henry never knew. I asked him just now if he knew, and he said no. They tell me that Henry is dead. Fools! He lives!"

"Of course."

"When he went to the study, I came to my room. See how cunning I was to get rid of the eye."

"Certainly."

"Then I flew down the stairs; I went to the window; I had a pistol—it is in the well now, with the eye—that terrible eye."

"Yes."

"My father taught me how to shoot."

"Ah! Who was your father?"

"My name was Sara Quigley. My father was a bad man; he was sometimes known as Doctor Quartz."

"Oh!"

"Nick Carter can tell you about him."

"Yes."

"I went to the window, I raised it a little; I fired, and he fell. It was too bad to hurt Henry, but I knew he would come back again."

"Well, and then——"

"Why, I climbed in at the window. My shoes squeaked, so I left them outside for fear of frightening the eye away before I could secure it. Then I went in. I got the eye. I tore it from his shirt-bosom, and I have killed it forever—only sometimes it glares at me."

"And then——"

"Then I went to my room, I put the shoes I had worn in Jane's shoe-bag. Oh, I was very cunning, Jane knows!"

"Of course."

"Henry says I did well."

"Has the eye gone, now? Can you go to sleep?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Come, Jane," said Nick, authoritatively.

She followed him from the room.

"Mad, hopelessly mad," said Nick to her, when they were in the hall-way. "How long have you known this, Jane?"

"For weeks, sir."

"Why were you willing to take this crime upon yourself? Why did you change the wills?"

"Because—because I loved her. Because I knew that she would recover; because I would give my life for her, sane or insane."

"I heard the shot which killed Mr. Danton. He knew that his wife's reason tottered. He made a new will. I knew where the old one was, and I exchanged them after he was dead."

"Did you know that your mistress went to the parlor and played and sang while her husband lay dead upon the floor?"

"Yes, poor thing. She believed that her singing would call him back to life; she believes that it has done so."

The mystery was solved; the clever criminal was a

mad woman, and Nick Carter's fortunate clew had explained all.

(THE END.)

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